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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [RU](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIA CONVENES G-8 MEETING ON COUNTER-TERRORISM

REF: BISHKEK 151

Classified By: DCM Jason P. Hyland, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: While participants at a Russian-chaired G-8 meeting on counter-terrorism issues agreed that Azerbaijan was a strong partner in the global war on terrorism, the meeting rapidly devolved into a discussion on Azerbaijan's reform record. Western countries argued that greater reform was needed to stave off potential domestic terrorism threats, while Russia argued that Azerbaijan's "success" on reform had eliminated these threats. Citing its "close" cooperation with GOAJ security services, Russia also said that Chechens posed the only real threat to Azerbaijan's security, while Iranian influences pose a potential threat to the Aliyev regime. The Russian FSB representative insisted that Azerbaijan does not face any internal terrorist threats but acknowledged that weak borders and corruption could make it easier for terrorists to enter Azerbaijan. This meeting provided a fascinating insight into Russia's relationship with Azerbaijan, but we do not support Russia's suggestion to share information on Azerbaijan's terrorism issues within the G-8 framework. End summary.

¶2. (S/NF) Russia, in its capacity as G-8 chair, held a February 9 "counter-terrorism working group" to explore current terrorism issues in Azerbaijan and possible venues for G-8 cooperation. France, Italy, Japan, Germany, the UK and the U.S. (represented by pol/econ chief and SIMO chief) attended the meeting. France also sent SIMO counterpart. Russia was represented by Charge Pyotr Burdikin and four embassy officials, most of whom were not presented to the group.

¶3. (C) Burdikin opened the meeting with Russia's very positive assessment of Azerbaijan's performance on counter-terrorism issues. Azerbaijan has ratified key UN conventions on terrorism, has taken action on terrorist financing under UNSCR 1373, has contributed peacekeeping troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and, in general, has demonstrated a strong desire to cooperate on counter-terrorism issues. Burdikin also noted that Azerbaijan's political and religious leaders have played a positive role in promoting dialogue among religious groups and the GOAJ works closely with the media to make sure that a message of tolerance is broadly disseminated. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan is both a transit point and a potential target for transnational terrorist groups and, according to Burdikin, Russia had evidence that some terrorist acts had been planned.

14. (C) While the western members of the G-8 agreed that the GOAJ was a strong partner on counter-terrorism issues, the UK, US, France and Germany argued that greater political and economic reform was needed to stave off any future domestic terrorism threats in Azerbaijan. Only with greater openness and transparency would the GOAJ be able to achieve true internal stability and ensure that Azerbaijani youth do not turn to extremism. The UK suggested that the slow growth of radical Islam in Azerbaijan was a trend that merited further attention.

15. (C) The Russian FSB representative bristled at this discussion, dismissing the possibility that the GOAJ could face an internal terrorism threat. In Russia's view, Azerbaijanis are peace-loving people who refrain from conflict. Moreover, GOAJ "success" on political and economic reform in recent years has eliminated any popular discontent within Azerbaijan. The GOAJ, according to the Russian FSB representative, does not believe it faces any internal threats from terrorism, and Russia also does not believe that there any domestic radical groups working in Azerbaijan. Only the Chechens pose a terrorism threat to Azerbaijan and Russia is taking measures to help Azerbaijan "push" the Chechens out of its territory. Iranian influence could also pose a "serious" threat to the Aliyev regime. Weaknesses in Azerbaijan's border controls, including corruption, could allow some terrorists to penetrate Azerbaijani territory; to that end, Russian Charge Burdikin suggested, perhaps G-8 members could begin sharing terrorism information in Azerbaijan. Burdikin's suggestion was met with noncommittal shrugs by most and a comment from the UK that this sort of meeting was not the appropriate venue. (Burdikin also made a point of telling the group that not all Chechens are bad

BAKU 00000240 002 OF 002

people.)

16. (S/NF) Comment: This awkward meeting, presumably called on instructions from Moscow (ref), provided a fascinating insight into the Russia-Azerbaijan bilateral relationship. The FSB representative made repeated reference to Russia's close relationship with the Ministry of National Security and clearly felt compelled to defend Azerbaijan's performance on democracy and human rights issues. Russia's insistence on the lack of domestic terrorist threats within Azerbaijan does not square with our information and suggests either deliberate disinformation on the part of the Russians or their "close" partners within Azerbaijan's security services.

We do not support Russia's suggestion to share information on Azerbaijan's terrorism issues within the framework of the G-8.

HARNISH